

A Different Kind of Code Red by the zesty lemon

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Summary: Eleven, Lucas and Dustin run into a spot of trouble at the arcade. Steve Harrington saves the day and is immortalized in the eyes of every Hawkin's housewife forever.

A Different Kind of Code Red

A/N: Please consider reading my other one shot, "Accidental Code Red" as I do make a few references to it in this short and it might confuse you otherwise. :)

Enjoy!

"Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god." Dustin paced back and forth frantically, eyes wide, shoes slapping against the tile, oblivious to how Eleven and Lucas watched him.

The three friends were holed up in the girls' washroom at the Palace Arcade, unable to move and their short list of people they could call was exhausted.

This was **NOT** how Dustin expected his Saturday to go.

It started out as such a good day. He'd gotten a full twelve hour sleep, his mom spoiled him with her famous cheesy hash brown casserole for breakfast, and then it was off to the arcade to meet Lucas and Eleven for a fun filled afternoon.

Saturday at the arcade—there was nothing like it, especially when it was summer break! The sounds of the arcade games, the weird smell of Cheetos, sweaty bodies and the strange tang of oil intermixed was familiar and comforting.

The three friends were only at the arcade for an hour before something went horrendously wrong.

"My stomach feels bad." Eleven grimaced.

It must have been bad if Eleven was willing to admit it. Often, she would shrug off any injuries, a side effect of her treatment in the lab and a habit Hopper and her friends were working hard to break her of. Trying to convince Eleven to tell them when she was hurt or not feeling well hadn't gone smoothly at first, but she'd gotten better at it.

"Your stomach?" Lucas repeated, sharing a concerned glance with

Dustin.

She nodded wordlessly, her mouth twisted in discomfort.

"Do you want to go home? We can bike you there." Lucas offered.

Eleven nodded again and Dustin immediately abandoned the game of Pac Man he'd been playing, letting the yellow character get caught by the ghosts. It was testament to how much he valued El that he was willing to abandon an in-progress game.

Lucas turned to lead the way, followed by Eleven. Dustin went to follow both of them, but frowned when he glanced down and noticed something strange on Eleven's jeans. It was a dark, fist sized stain. Maybe she sat in some chocolate?

"Hey, wait a second El, you've got something on your pants."

Eleven paused and turned; stretching her body awkwardly to try to see what Dustin was talking about.

"Wait a second... that's not chocolate... it looks like... blood?" Dustin blanched.

"What?" Lucas's eyes widened.

Eleven craned her neck even more, trying to see the stain.

"Hold on, hold on. Go to the bathroom. There must be a mirror in there right?" Dustin jerked his thumb towards the back of the arcade where the bathrooms were located.

Eleven didn't need any more prompting and sped off towards the back, Lucas and Dustin flanking her dutifully. She ducked into the girls' bathroom, leaving the boys standing awkwardly in the hallway.

A few minutes passed before Dustin and Lucas realized something must be wrong.

No other girl had entered or left the girls' bathroom since Eleven went in, meaning it was probably safe. With a worried glance at each other, Lucas knocked on the door and open it tentatively.

"Uh... El? Are you okay in here?"

It was silent, except for a distinct snuffle and then a small: "no."

Neither boy hesitated and rushed into the washroom.

"El?" Dustin called worriedly, and then spotted Eleven huddled up against the far side of the tiled wall, her legs drawn up to her chest, her eyes rimmed red.

"What's the matter?" He asked, rushing to her side and looking around for the offending thing that made his friend upset.

Eleven was silent for a moment, wiping at her eyes before she finally answered.

"Period."

"Period?" Dustin repeated in bewilderment, sharing a confused glance with Lucas.

"My period." Eleven said again, her face pale, "I got my first period."

The blood drained from Lucas and Dustin's faces so fast even a vampire would have been impressed.

"Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhh..." Dustin didn't realize it was him who was making that noise until Lucas punched him in the arm. He snapped his jaw shut so fast, his teeth clattered.

"Do you have any um... supplies? For your period?" Lucas prodded gently.

Dustin turned to stare at his friend in shock. How did Lucas know about this kind of thing?

El shook her head unhappily.

"Oh." Lucas said lamely, rubbing the back of his head.

That was the moment Dustin started freaking out—pacing back and forth like a crazy person.

He was completely and utterly out of his depth here.

Dustin only knew the very, very basics of the female menstrual cycle because of Mr. Clarke's health unit. He knew that once a month women had a time where they were bleeding down there—and Dustin kind of just blocked the rest out. (Not because he thought that the menstrual cycle was gross or anything, it just freaked him out that anyone could bleed that much once a month and live to tell the tale).

What could they do?

They couldn't walk out of here—because if anyone saw Eleven's blood stained pants, it would be Hawkins Social Suicide.

When Mike asked him and Lucas to look after Eleven while he was gone on vacation with his family (not something Mike was very happy about—at all), Dustin fully took it to heart. That included any physical, emotional and mental harm that may come to their psychokinetically super powered friend—they had to prevent it! But how?

"Dude." Lucas yanked on Dustin's arm and firmly held him put. "You have to calm down. El's already panicking. You can't panic too. We have to be cool."

Dustin glanced over his shoulder at Eleven, who was still curled up against the wall, her wide gaze focused on them both. She looked miserable and pale.

Lucas let go of his arm once he saw Dustin take a deep breath, and rein the crazy back in.

"Who can we call?"

"Mike?" Eleven asked meekly.

Lucas and Dustin gave El an empathetic look. Dustin slid down the wall and sat down next to her.

"Your boy toy's in Florida, El. I don't think he'll be able to help us for this one. But you know he would if he could." Dustin tacked on

hastily. He was hoping to make El crack a smile; she loved it when he called Mike her boy toy (Mike hated it, which of course only made Dustin do it more).

"Hop?" El asked.

"I'll go phone the station." Lucas immediately offered.

A quick trip to the payphone out front warranted no results. Hopper was out on a call and Flo wasn't sure when he'd be back.

In Lucas's absence, Dustin managed to steal a poster from the wall of the bathroom, write "OUT OF ORDER" on the back, and stuck it to the bathroom door with a big wad of chewing gum he fished out from under the sink. This way, no one would bother them while they figured something out. It would be a hard to explain why they were loitering in the girls' bathroom otherwise.

"What about Max? She's a girl." Dustin brightened, as though he'd thought of something brilliant.

Lucas smacked his shoulder in annoyance.

"Yes Max is a girl." Lucas rolled his eyes, "but her mom dragged her to some 'girl's day at the new mall. She couldn't get out of it."

El and Dustin deflated at that.

"What about your mom, Dustin?" Lucas asked.

Dustin shook his head. "My mom took Mews the Second to the vet and groomer. She'll be out all day. What about your mom?"

It was Lucas's turn to shake his head. "They're in Glensdale for a golf thing. They won't be back until late tonight."

"What about Mrs. Byers?"

Lucas sighed. "They're in New York, remember? Visiting Jonathan and Nancy? I don't have a phone number for them."

Their short list quickly came to a screeching standstill.

Who could they call? They couldn't want to walk El out as was. The stain on her pants was noticeable enough and being caught with a period stain on her jeans could ruin her high school career before it even began!

Lucas groaned and slid down the tile wall on the other side of El, head in his hands in defeat.

Dustin wracked his brain for anyone, anyone else they could call for such a sensitive matter on short notice—and who wouldn't blab a word of this to anyone.

And just like that, he knew.

"Give me the walkie-talkie."

...

The day started as optimistically normal as Steve Harrington could ask.

He woke up on time and had a decent, Hopper approved breakfast (a cup of coffee as dark as the upside down, minus the cigarette), merrily made his way to the station, downed another half a pot to himself, and immediately delved into the pile of paperwork teetering precariously on his desk.

Powell was out on a call with Hop, and Callaghan was talking his goddamn ear off all morning about something... Callaghan-y. Steve immediately tuned him out, only offering the occasional "uh-huh" here and there, which seemed to be more than enough encouragement for Callaghan to keep running his mouth.

The walkie-talkie crackled at his waist around 2:00PM and Steve Harrington's optimistically normal day came crashing down around his ears.

"Steve. Come in Steve. Over."

Steve glanced up from his paperwork in surprise and down at the beat up old walkie-talkie he kept next to his station one on his belt.

Old habits died hard. Ever since Dustin bestowed him with the title of "honorary party member" and given him a walkie-talkie so that he could always be in contact with the party in case of emergency, Steve kept the walkie-talkie charged and nearby. As annoying as those shit heads were sometimes... truthfully, Steve wanted them to be able to call on him. Every time that walkie-talkie crackled to life, he wondered if he was going to hear those fateful words: "the upside down is back", or "CODE BLACK" as the party decided a good couple of months ago now.

Steve reminded himself that most of the time Dustin called him to beg for a ride. Or whine at him for snacks.

Sighing, Steve reached and unclipped the walkie-talkie from his belt.

"I'm at work shit head, what have we talked about? Over." Steve fumbled his pen and watched it fall off the desk, unimpressed.

Callaghan grinned at him from his desk, used to Steve's strange mom-like relationship with the kids by now.

"Steve you son of a bitch! Thank god. We've got a situation here." Dustin's panicked voice made Steve sit up a straighter, alert. "I don't want to say we've got a code red here but... We've kind of got a code red here. Over."

Steve frowned. By now even he knew that a Code Red was very serious in party lingo. It was second only to Code Black: the return of the Upside Down.

"How can you kind of have a Code Red?" Steve decided to ask the most obvious question.

There was a brief pause on the other end of the walkie.

"Er... I don't want to say it over this frequency, but trust me Steve. It's uh... a different kind of Code Red. We're at the arcade and we need you. And bring a spare set of pants and some aspirin. Over and out."

Steve sat at his desk, dumbfounded and disgruntled.

What the hell was that? Why was Dustin asking him to bring a spare

set of pants? What could possibly be a kind of Code Red at the arcade?

And yet... he unconsciously reached for his keys and hat as he stood at his desk.

"Flo, do we have any spare pants around here?" Steve asked.

"Check the brown cabinet in the back." Flo remarked, barely looking up from her novel at the front desk.

Steve did as directed, heading to the brown, dusty cabinet in the back room and checked the top drawer.

Nothing.

He opened the second one and scored an old worn pair of uniform pants. He fished them out and headed back through the front office.

Callaghan wordlessly tossed Steve a bottle of aspirin with a little smirk and made a "wchtcha!" noise, complete with a whip motion and an obnoxious laugh.

Steve caught the bottle and flipped him off.

He didn't need Callaghan or all people to tell him those kids had him whipped.

...

Steve pulled up to the Palace Arcade not ten minutes later and immediately almost mowed down Lucas.

"Jesus Sinclair!" Steve slammed on the breaks of the cruiser and came to a squealing stop in front of the arcade.

The little shit didn't even stop, he just slapped the hood of the car in his haste to get around to the driver's side window. "Did you bring the pants? And the Aspirin?" Lucas asked desperately.

Steve dumbly held the musty old uniform pants up. Lucas snatched them and turned around hastily, getting a few steps before he turned

back to the cruiser.

"What are you doing Harrington? Come on!"

Steve grumbled and unlatched his seatbelt before hopping out of the vehicle, slamming the door with a little more force than necessary.

Pushing open the front doors of the arcade, he was greeted by the familiar smells of Cheetos, sweaty nerds and the tangy musk of oil. A few people gave him a curious glance before promptly ignoring him again and getting on with their games.

Lucas disappeared towards the back of the arcade and Steve had no choice but to follow. He trotted through the crowd and towards the back—where he'd last seen Lucas, but he was gone. Steve frowned and glanced down the hallway, but it was just the bathrooms. There was a sloppily written "OUT OF ORDER" sign taped to the door of the girls' bathroom, but there was no sign of the rugrats.

Sighing, he turned around to go take a look in the rest of the arcade again, when, without warning Steve was grabbed by the scruff of his collar and dragged backwards. He swore, and turned around to throw the arm off of him.

"Whoa, whoa, WHOA! Calm down asshole it's just me!" Dustin raised his hands into the air in surrender.

"You'd better start explaining kid and I'd better like what I hear."

"Okay. But you can't be mad." Dustin held up his hands pleadingly. "El needs your help. Follow me."

Steve's eyebrows rose when Dustin quickly checked the hall, and ducked into the girls' bathroom. He heaved a long-suffering sigh and followed after only a moment's hesitation.

The sight that greeted him was a little underwhelming.

Eleven sat on the tiled bathroom floor, her knees hugged against her chest and looking paler than she normally did.

"Hey El." Steve said gently, nodding at Lucas, "what's wrong?"

Eleven shared a brief, wordless conversation with Dustin and Lucas with a glance before she finally answered:

"First Period."

Steve frowned and an awkward beat of silence passed.

"First period?" He repeated unsurely.

Eleven nodded.

Steve stared at her uncomprehendingly. "Like... the class? You don't start those for another three weeks."

It was Eleven's turn to stare uncomprehendingly at Steve.

"No, no, no." Lucas interjected exasperatedly, "she got her first period Steve."

It took another few seconds for this information to fully click into place.

"Your first period... OH." Steve took a deep breath and ran his hand through his luscious locks in an agitated habit. "And you...called me about this? Instead of anyone else?"

"You weren't our first choice, believe me." Dustin groaned.

Steve tried to ignore the sting from that comment (which was silly given the situation).

"What about Max?"

"Forced 'Girls Day' with her mom. Don't ask."

"Mrs. Byers?"

"She's in New York with Will."

"Mrs. Wheeler?"

"Florida."

"Your mom?" Steve jerked his head at Lucas, who shook his head exasperatedly.

"Glensdale. Won't be back until tonight."

"And my mom is at the groomer and vet with Mews the Second all day Steve, we've been over this." Dustin offered before he could even ask.

"Oh." Steve said lamely.

Steve Harrington wasn't an expert on the female menstrual cycle by any means. His mother never felt the need to explain it to him and it wasn't until he started having sex in high school that he knew it was a thing at all. Mostly, back then, Steve found it more annoying than anything because it meant when girls had their period, they didn't have sex.

It wasn't until Nancy that he got a crash course in what exactly the menstrual cycle was, but he still had no idea what to do about this particular situation.

Hopper was currently out on a call. Steve quickly put two and two together, realizing it must have been the kids who phoned the station earlier to talk to the chief.

Despite feeling entirely out of his depth, he asked the most logical question. "So what's the problem exactly?"

"El's pants are stained. We can't just let her walk out of here like that. If anyone notices, it will be total and complete social suicide!" Dustin exclaimed dramatically.

"And she doesn't have any supplies. So we need to get her out of here unseen and get her some...um..." Lucas screwed up his face, clearly trying to remember something. "Some sanitary pads or... tampons?"

Steve and Dustin stared at him in surprise.

Lucas sighed. "My mom gave me the talk already. She didn't leave out any details."

A whimper of pain snapped the three boys from their conversation instantly.

"El?" Lucas was at her side immediately.

Eleven shook her head and hugged herself around the middle.

It was Lucas who clued in first.

"Shit! Steve, you got the aspirin right? She has cramps."

"Yeah." Steve quickly reached into his pants pocket and grabbed the small bottle. He shook one out onto the palm of his hand and held it out to Eleven. When she opened her eyes and saw the tiny pill, she shrank against the bathroom wall.

"It's aspirin." Steve kneeled down slowly and showed her the tiny white pill.

He'd been around the kid enough now to know that certain things tended to trigger painful memories. If she lived in a lab for the first twelve years of her life, Steve imagined she was no stranger to taking pills.

"It will help your pain go away for a while. Here, I'll take one first so you can see it's safe." Steve screwed the bottle cap back on and got ready to tilt his head back.

A cool hand on his wrist stopped him.

Eleven gazed at him with such searing intensity that Steve was pinned in place.

"Friends don't lie." She said quietly, nodding. She moved her hand from his wrist and held it out, palm up, waiting to accept the pill.

"Oh." Was all he could manage to say, trying to swallow the sudden lump in his throat as he mechanically dumped the Aspirin into Eleven's hand.

Normally Eleven looked to the other party members for their trust in people. That she hadn't looked to either Dustin or Lucas before

making her decision to accept the pill from him meant that she made the decision alone to trust him.

The gravity of that trust was not lost on Steve and he silently vowed to do his best to never betray that trust. Ever.

"It will take a little while for it to kick in, but it should help." Steve explained sympathetically as Eleven gulped down the pill with a grimace with some grape soda Dustin scored from the vending machine.

"So what's the plan?" Dustin asked, turning abruptly to Lucas.

"Why are you looking at me?" Lucas asked, annoyance singeing his tone.

Dustin rolled his eyes. "Duh. You're clearly the expert here, whether you like it or not. I don't know shit about this stuff, but we have Steve to help us now. What should we do?"

Lucas frowned and glanced back at Eleven, but she was resting her forehead against her knees, eyes shut.

He took a deep breath.

"Uh... okay." He gulped unsurely, "El. Do you have any um... lady supplies at home yet? Did you and Hopper get around to buying any?"

Eleven wordlessly shook her head.

"Shit. That means, we can't bring El home. We have to stop and buy her some."

The gravity of their situation was just beginning to dawn on Dustin.

"You don't mean—" Dustin gasped.

Lucas nodded grimly. "Aisle three."

"Aisle three?" Steve glanced between the two rapidly paling teens.

Dustin clapped his hand on Steve's shoulder and shook his head solemnly. "Oh Steve, you sweet little daffodil... you're about to learn what aisle three is."

"Whatever shithead, let's just get going."

The two boys needed no more prompting and helped Eleven up. She carefully rolled her stained pants and tucked them under her arm before they exited the bathroom.

They got exactly two steps away from the door before they heard the familiar noise: the crinkle of a bag of Cheetos.

Lucas, Dustin, Eleven and Steve turned around to see Keith, standing behind them, his eyes narrowed. He held the "OUT OF ORDER" sign in Dustin's face accusingly.

"Unauthorized out of order sign? Lurking in the girls' bathroom? Banished! Two weeks! Don't even think about showing your faces around here wastoids." Keith sneered, reaching into his customary bag of Cheetos.

"Yeah whatever Keith. We've got bigger fish to fry." Dustin snarked back, barely giving him a second glance as they escorted Eleven out of the arcade, like a squad detail protecting the president.

Being banished from the arcade for two weeks stung, but better to be banished for two weeks than a lifetime of teasing.

It seemed like an eternity before they reached Steve's cruiser, and Lucas and Dustin breathed a sigh of relief when they finally made it.

Eleven slide into the back seat with Lucas and Dustin took shotgun.

"Where to?" Steve asked once everyone was buckled in.

"Melvald's." Lucas instructed expertly.

...

Not ten minutes later, Steve pulled the cruiser to a smooth stop in front of the general store and killed the engine.

"Okay Steve, good luck." Dustin said cheerily.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Why do I have to go in?" Steve turned around in his seat to face both of the boys.

Dustin and Lucas exchanged a quick glance.

Had Steve ever told the shitheads how creepy it was that they could hold entire conversations silently? Because it was creepy.

"Well El can't. And if we go in and anyone sees us, we're dead meat. Would you want to be the freshman who got caught in aisle three?" Dustin rolled his eyes.

For the brief, brief, briefest of moments Steve debated on kicking all three kids out of the car. But as soon as the thought was there, it was gone.

Dustin was right. If he or Lucas were caught in aisle three, buying sanitary pads or tampons or whatever, it would absolutely be social suicide. Although Steve wasn't a hell of a lot older and if he got caught in the notorious aisle three with lady supplies in hand, it wouldn't be much better for his social life either...but he was the adult here and he wasn't about to let that happen to any of the shitheads under his watch.

Damn his heart of gold.

"Fine. Got any cash?" Steve held his hand out to the car in general. There was a slight shuffling as several coins were deposited into his palm. "Gee, a whopping seventy-five cents. Thanks."

"We were at the arcade!" Lucas held his hands up defensively.

Luckily, Steve had a couple more bucks on him. The supplies couldn't be too much. He was fairly sure they could afford to buy at something to tide Eleven over until they could get in contact with Hopper.

Steve unbuckled his seatbelt, adjusted his hat and said: "If I'm not out in ten minutes call for backup."

Lucas and Dustin saluted him as he got out of the car.

The door to Melvald's chimed when he pushed the glass door open, announcing his presence. Steve nodded at the cashier, who gave him a brief look before turning back to the magazine they were reading at the front cash.

Just play it cool, Harrington.

He glanced around the store casually, checking to make sure the coast was clear. Luckily, the store seemed to be empty.

Steve scanned the overhead aisle signs and quickly located the aforementioned dreaded "aisle three".

The sight that greeted him was unlike anything he had ever seen.

"Shit."

There were so many packages—all brightly coloured; declaring their goods in bold wording and he had no fucking clue what any of it meant.

Heavy flow?

Long?

Wings?

What did that even mean?

What did any of it mean?

Steve stood motionless for a good ten seconds, unable to process what he was looking at. This was supposed to be a quick hit and run—but what if he got the wrong type? How would he even know if there was a wrong type?

For a moment he debated turning around and heading back to the cruiser to ask Eleven what she needed. He turned around almost immediately when he realized she probably didn't know because this was her first time having to buy something like this!

Hopper had warned him about a situation like this on the job. Sometimes—there would be no backup. They couldn't get there in time and it was your responsibility to make a decision and just stay alive.

Steve had no backup. No one was coming. It was up to him to make a decision and somehow make it out alive.

With a deep breath, he plunged into the aisle.

Scanning the packages, Steve quickly surmised there were two camps: tampons and sanitary pads. If he could eliminate one of these options this would be an unexpected boon because then he would only have to focus on one category.

Tentatively, Steve reached for a package of tampons and read the back. He got about as far as the word "insert into" and then he just stopped reading, put the package down and stepped away.

Mentally crossing tampons off his list, he moved on to the sanitary pads. There were an overwhelming amount of kinds.

Did Eleven want wings? Did she need wings? Why did you need wings down there anyways?

He was weighing his options between a green package with no wings and "regular flow" and one with wings for "heavy flow" when someone said:

"Do you need help Mr. Harrington?"

Steve damn near jumped out of his own skin.

He bit down hard to stop himself from letting out a slew of curses and turned to to see a well-dressed woman, who gave him a knowing smile. She looked familiar, but couldn't place her face. Likely it was one of his mom's high society friends—because she was impossibly, impeccably dressed and not one carefully coifed hair was out of place.

"I... uh..." Steve glanced down at the packages in his hands and discreetly tried to hide them behind his back.

"Buying for a lady friend?" The familiar lady—Mrs. Hayes—his mind supplied finally, winked at him conspiratorially.

"Er... No. For a friend. It was an emergency." Steve tried to smile charmingly, but it came out forced and uncomfortable.

Mrs. Hayes' eyebrows shot up and she let out a dainty little "oh! You darling boy. What a good friend you are. My husband won't even come near this aisle, yet here you are!"

Unbeknownst to Steve, he had just become a saint in the eyes of every housewife in Hawkins (the ramifications of this, while unclear at this time, and would soon become clear). Although it was just Mrs. Hayes who witnessed him trying to buy menstruation supplies for a friend—soon every housewife in Hawkins would know. It was like a goddamn underground network. Mrs. Hayes was well connected and talked to nearly everyone in Hawkins. A man who wasn't afraid to go into aisle three and buy supplies for a girl he wasn't even dating?

Mrs. Hayes just about swooned. Her friends were going to love hearing about this!

Steve smiled awkwardly, thinking that if he lived through today he would never complain about anything ever again. Somehow he survived the all the weirdness of the Upside Down—demo dogs, demo gorgons—but this might be the thing that finally got him.

"You look a little lost dear, did your friend not tell you which ones to grab?"

And yet! The very thing that Steve thought would kill him might actually be his salvation.

He let out an embarrassed laugh and made sure to give Mrs. Hayes a pleading, yet earnest smile. "Yeah and I have no idea which one to buy Mrs. Hayes. Could you please help me out? I'd really appreciate it."

Okay, so he was laying the charm on a little thick, but Mrs. Hayes seemed to be eating it up with a spoon. She looked about two seconds away from pinching his cheeks.

"Of course!" She turned to the shelf and scanned it expertly. "Ah. These ones here are your safest bet." She plucked a yellow package off the shelf and handed it to Steve.

"Thanks Mrs. Hayes. You're a lifesaver." Steve breathed in relief. He hastily placed the other two packages back onto the shelves.

"Any time Mr. Harrington," Mrs. Hayes demurred, "you make sure to say hello to your mom for me okay? And..." She glanced conspiratorially down each end of the aisle before she continued, "you know, my eldest daughter Jessica, recently broke up with her boyfriend... maybe you should give her a call sometime. Such a sweet boy like yourself would be nice to have around." Mrs. Hayes tittered and then a confused Steve a fond goodbye for now.

He'd never been so fucking confused in his life—how had he gone from getting help selecting sanitary pads to Mrs. Hayes practically inviting him to ask her daughter out?

Nothing made sense anymore, but he couldn't dwell on it.

Steve hustled to the front of the store and hurriedly paid for the sanitary pads.

The cashier gave him a brief, raised eyebrow when she saw what he was purchasing, but thankfully said nothing else and bagged the item in a brown paper bag.

He could feel the kids' eyes on him as soon as he left the store. Dustin and Lucas had their faces pressed against the window, looking desperately between him and the brown paper bag in his hand.

As soon as he opened the door, he was barraged with questions.

"Did you get it?"

"Did anyone see you?"

"Can you show your face in Hawkins anymore? Or do you have to skip town? We'll help you pack."

Steve sighed and slid into the car, slamming his door behind him.

"Calm down shitheads I got it." He tossed the brown paper bag into Dustin's lap, who jumped and promptly handed it off to Eleven.

"You got what?"

This time Steve jumped in his seat so hard that he hit his head on the ceiling of the cruiser and let loose a string of curses so potent that even potty-mouthed Dustin was staring at him, jaw agape.

Max Mayfield leaned against the driver side door, her face split into a shit-eating grin and looking far too pleased.

"Max!" Lucas exclaimed happily, immediately opening the door for her and sliding over closer to Eleven to make room.

"Hey nerds." Max greeted, sliding into the back seat and making herself right at home.

"We finished our 'girls day' early and I spotted you on the drive home. Now what did you get, Harrington? Wait—are you feeling okay El?" Max asked worriedly when she spotted Eleven.

Eleven nodded. "I'm okay now. Thank you Steve." She said quietly but meaningfully.

"No problem kid."

"Whoa, what did I miss?" Max asked excitedly.

Steve started to drive as Dustin and Lucas excitedly regaled Max with the day's events. From their first predicament to the arcade, to being banished from the arcade for two weeks and Steve's foray into the dreaded aisle three—catching her up to that very moment.

"Whoa. You did all that, for them?" Max asked, her eyes widening once they were done. She looked at Steve in the rearview mirror like she was truly seeing him for the first time.

Steve rolled his eyes and nodded. "Yeah. Just don't get used to it." He grumbled (and didn't mean it in the slightest).

"I just have one thing to say Harrington," Max implored honestly.

Steve glanced at her in curiosity.

"Wchtcha!" Max snickered, making a whip motion with her arm.

Dustin, Lucas and Max burst out laughing.

"Yeah, yeah." Steve sighed. At least no one else except Mrs. Hayes and the cashier knew about today. If he was lucky, it might stay that way.

Eleven glanced at Steve, to her friends and back at Steve once more before something strange happened.

Steve, despite applying steady pressure on the gas pedal, was surprised to find that the vehicle was rapidly slowing down.

"Hey—what the?" He took his foot off the pedal and let the car come to a slow stop at the side of the road.

Suddenly, the passenger side doors sprung open on their own accord, startling them all. In that next moment, Steve would never forget the look on Dustin, Lucas and Max's faces as they were firmly, but carefully ejected out of the car by an invisible force and deposited on the side of the road.

"You can walk until you are ready to say sorry to Steve." El said firmly, her tone leaving no room for argument.

The doors closed and the car began to roll slowly away. Steve's hands weren't even on the wheel, he was too shocked.

He turned around in his seat and saw the three kids quickly scramble up off the sidewalk and begin to run after the car, Eleven clearly having made her point.

"You're a cool kid, Hopper." Steve grinned in satisfaction.

Eleven nodded and wiped at her nose with a smirk.

Steve turned his attention back to the road. He'd be damned if he let the thirteen year old (psychokinetically super powered or otherwise) drive for much longer.

...

The ride towards Hopper Cabin was a quiet one (until Steve stopped the car only five minutes later to let Max, Lucas and Dustin back in after they sincerely apologized).

...

"Steve. Gotta sec?" Steve blinked in surprise at Hop, who was loitering just outside the front of the station, smoking a cigarette.

It was the end of a long day—there had been numerous calls out and everyone was beat. All Steve wanted to do was go home, microwave dinner and fall into bed.

"Sure chief." He agreed, standing to the side as Callaghan and Powell pulled out of their parking spots and headed home.

"I wanted to talk to you about something, kid."

Uh oh. Those were never good words. Steve tried to resist the urge to gulp, wondering what he could have done wrong. It had been a steep learning curve starting at the police station, but he thought he'd been doing an okay job. Hopper certainly wasn't shy in telling him if he fucked up anyways.

"Here." Hopper held out his fist and out of reflex Steve extended his hand, palm up. The chief pressed a five-dollar bill into his hand and Steve stared at it in bewilderment.

"El told me." Hopper said simply, taking a drag of his cigarette. "Well, all of the brats tried to tell me at the same time last night, but I finally got the story straight and I just wanted to say thanks."

Steve froze, completely taken off guard.

"It was no problem sir." He finally remembered his manners, "and this is too much. Lucas and Dustin spotted me some."

Hopper waved him off. "I already paid the kids back, and consider the extra as gas money." Hopper tossed his cigarette to the ground and ground it out with the toe of his boot before he looked properly

at Steve.

That was something Hopper and Eleven both shared despite not being related by blood—both had the ability to make you feel as though they could pierce through your very soul with their gaze.

"That's twice you've had El's back, hell—twice you've had the kids' backs not counting all the Upside Down shit. You're a good guy Harrington and I want you to know if you need anything, I've got your back." Hopper clapped him on the shoulder firmly, as though to solidify the weight behind his words.

For a moment Steve couldn't speak. For months he'd been at a strange standstill with his parents over his decision to join the Hawkins Police Department instead of following in his dad's footsteps. His parent's made their displeasure clear: he was no longer living with them and in fact, they barely spoke. He lived by himself, in a small, crappy apartment and he wasn't sure his parents would even have his back right now.

Knowing that someone like Jim Hopper was behind him... it was overwhelming, but in a good way.

"Thanks chief." Steve finally managed, meaning it wholly and sincerely. Hopper nodded and turned to head to his truck. He paused as though he'd thought better of something, before calling over his shoulder:

"We're having pizza tonight. El's having those hooligans over. Can you give me a hand carrying the boxes?"

They both knew damn well Hopper of all people didn't need a hand carrying pizza boxes, but Steve wasn't about to turn down the thinly veiled offer. A loud house full of those obnoxious shitheads and some greasy pizza sure beat his silent, empty apartment.

"Sure chief. We wouldn't want you to throw out your back." Steve grinned.

Hopper grumbled, got into the truck and rolled down the window. "You can walk until you're ready to apologize." And then he

proceeded to start slowly backing out and driving down the street.

Steve laughed.

Now he knew where Eleven had got it from.

He followed after the truck, grinning, a half-assed apology on his lips.

...

Bonus: The Ramifications of the Secret Network of Hawkins Housewives become Clear

Three weeks later...

"Harrington. Phone is for you." Flo called, holding up the receiver of the police station's line.

Steve glanced up from his paper work and looked at Powell, who then looked to Callaghan with a grin. He sighed, got up and tried to ignore how his coworkers were currently exchanging money and bets behind his back.

"Hello? Harrington here." Steve greeted politely.

"Uh, hi Steve," a voice greeted tentatively, "it's Meghan Barkley. We had English together in sophomore year? Anyways, I was wondering if you'd like to go out sometime..."

Steve listened politely as Meghan Barkley proceeded to ask him out over the phone, while wondering why the fuck this was happening again. It was like the police station phone was his personal date-a-Harrington hotline.

Callaghan and Powell thought it was hilarious—Hopper too, the bastard. Flo just seemed tired of these random girls calling and interrupting her important novel reading time.

"I'm flattered Meghan, but I'm really just focusing on my career right now." Steve said kindly. He'd definitely got some practice in turning down these ladies in as nice as possible of a way in the last three weeks.

It was true, after all. Between his new job, trying to cook for himself and look after his own little dingy apartment and not to mention he was practically a single mother of six little shitheads—he just really didn't have the time for dating.

Meghan sighed dreamily and said, "well, if you ever change your mind, you know where to find me." They said goodbye and Steve hung up the phone.

"Not a word, Callaghan." Steve threatened, stomping back to his desk and plopping down without a glance.

"That's another fiver for me Cal." Powell whispered non-too subtly.

Steve groaned, his head thumping against his paperwork covered desk. "Do you think it will ever stop?"

"No." Powell, Callaghan, Flo and even Hopper (who chimed in from his office) said in unison.

...

(Months later, Steve was still constantly being set up with every Hawkins' housewife's available daughters.)